

Minutes September 5 , 2008 Facilitation of Community Choices Committee

The Committee met in the Town Room, Town Hall. The meeting was called to order at 9:04

Members Present: Richard Spurgin , Stan Gawle, Joan Golowich, Gerald Jolly, Alison Donta-Venman, Martha Hanner and Isaac Ben-Ezra .

Members Absent : Katherine Vorwerk- Feldman, Bob Saul and Irvin Rhodes

Others Present : Stephanie O’Keeffe, Helen Vivian, Andy Churchill, John Musante , Elaine Brighty and Robert Detweiler.

Minutes of August 28,2008 On a motion by Joan Golowich and a second by Alison Donta-Venman, the minutes were approved as submitted.

Minutes of July 31,2008 On a motion by Martha Hanner and a second by Stan Gawle, the minutes were approved as submitted.

Announcements: John Musante announced that our meetings have been posted for each Thursday for the remainder of the month of September

Capital improvements: John Musante explained that the formation of the Joint Capital Planning Committee in the 1990’s was done for the purpose of insuring co-ordination and reducing conflict amongst the competing groups.

The goal of the group was to utilize 10% of the tax levy for the funding of capital projects. This allocation was in addition to additional capital funds realized from grants, state Chapter 90 and other town funds such as the ambulance fund, the sewer and water enterprise funds and Community Preservation funds.

Due to budget constraints in the last several years, the 10% amount taken from the tax levy had been reduced to 7% in FY 2008 and was increased to 7.25% in FY 2009. It would take an additional \$1,000,000 to raise the 7.25% to 10%.

Several large capital projects are in the near future: Wildwood and Fort River are nearing 40 years and were built at a time when a different education philosophy dictated how classrooms and other spaces were designed; \$13m fire station study was recently completed ; the DPW garage is over a 100 years old and roads and sidewalks maintenance is being looked at to be increased by additional borrowing. Some of these large ticket items could be done by the use of debt exclusion overrides.

Stan Gawle requested that amounts for the school renovations and DPW garage and any other borrowing during the next 5 years be given to the committee. This would enable the taxpayers to have a total picture of both capital and operational costs that the Town is considering.

Revenue Scenarios: Alison Donta –Venman explained that she had requested from John Musante gap closing information regarding how much each scenario would cost an individual home owner. John explained that an average home assessed at \$332,500 would pay an additional \$160 per \$1m in expenditures above the normal 2.5% increase.

There was considerable discussion on which gap closing options were realistic within the 5 year time frame. There was discussion on the use of front loaded overrides; sequential overrides; menu overrides and the funding of core vs. other programs. No decision was reached.

On a motion by Alison Donta-Venman and a second by Isaac Ben-Ezra, the committee voted to include capital budget scenarios as part of our community presentation.

Outreach Report: Jerry Jolly reported on the recent activities of the committee. They have been meeting with the IT staff regarding the Amherst Choices website; they have been discussing various groups such as the Rotary and Amherst Club to make presentations to; on October 20th, a presentation will be made to the Senior Center; they discussed possible outreach strategies utilizing precinct meetings, the League of Women Voters and the NAACP. They said that some presentations would take place for 1 hr., 30 minutes etc..

Alison Donta-Venman raised several issues regarding the varying length of the presentations and the need to then produce 3 separate power point presentations. It was generally agreed that the slide presentation would allow an easy way to reduce the number of slides and that she would assume that responsibility. She also said that handouts would be needed for each public presentation and John Musante said that there are available Town funds to cover that expense.

Alison Donta-Venman also expressed her concern that there were still gaps in information for some of the slides.

It was agreed that we would concentrate on reducing the number of slides next week to between 50-60.

It was further suggested that the Chamber of Commerce be contacted to have a presentation.

Meeting Adjourned at 11:04

